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A SURVEY OF PROBLEMS CONFRONTING THE CHRISTIAN
MISSIONARY TO THE RURAL AREAS OF JAPAN

A Thesis Presented to the Faculty
of Concordia Seminary, St. Louis,
Department of Practical Theology
in partial fulfillment of the
requirements for the degree of
Bachelor of Divinity

by

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June 1951

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

The history of mission work in Japan conducted by Christian groups dates back almost eighty years.¹ Even a cursory study of that history reveals that this work has been characterized by alternate periods of very rapid and very slow progress.² If one is to believe the reports sent back by the missionaries to Japan since the cessation of hostilities between Japan and the West in 1945, these five and one-half years have been a period of renewed interest in Christianity by the Japanese.

Most of the Protestant work in these eighty years has been carried on in the cities and larger towns. Rural people have often been neglected. In 1938 there were churches in only 237 rural villages, and there were more than 9,000 villages still unreached.³ In 1939 it was reported that there were 1,900 rural towns of over 5,000 population that have had no church or preaching place at all.⁴

However, it is undoubtedly true that as time goes on

¹J. Aberly, An Outline of Missions (Philadelphia: Muhlenberg Press, c.1945), p. 173.

²Ibid., pp. 170-85.

³R. A. Felton, "The Rural Church in Japan (I)," Japan Christian Quarterly, XIII (January, 1938), 28.

⁴S. Hirono, "Renewed Emphasis on Evangelism," Japan Christian Quarterly, XIV (October, 1939), 333-4.

and the Christian Church grows in Japan, more and more work will be attempted in rural areas. In the following pages an attempt has been made to investigate these problems. No effort has been made to discuss the methods that have been used to deal with them, but where these problems have been solved or have been brought closer to solution owing to certain circumstances, the author has tried to take cognizance of this fact. This study cannot be exhaustive as will become apparent especially in Chapter IV, which deals with the religious life of the country people.

After one chapter describing the type of environment that one doing mission work in rural Japan will face, the author has grouped the problems under the areas in which these problems will be met. Finally a chapter is devoted to those problems which did not fit well into one of these categories.

Of special help in this study was Dr. John F. Embree's Suye Mura: A Japanese Village, a scientific anthropological-sociological study of a village in Southern Japan, as well as various articles in the Japan Christian Quarterly of pre-war days.

CHAPTER II

THE JAPANESE COUNTRYSIDE

One cannot understand the problems of the Christian missionary to the rural areas of Japan without at least a basic understanding of these rural areas themselves. Unlike the United States but similar to the prevailing village pattern of agricultural settlements in Europe and southeastern Asia, the country's rural sections are characterized by cluster settlements. The farmers live together in small villages and till fields which surround them. The only exceptions to this rule are in the mountain and hill land and on the Island of Hokkaido.¹

Politically Japan is divided into forty-six administrative districts, called prefectures.² These are again divided into mura, machi, and shi. The shi are cities, and the terms machi and mura are usually translated as "town" and "village" respectively, although this is somewhat misleading since both refer to administrative districts rather than to clustered settlements.³ Rather, a mura consists of "several such house clusters, each

¹G. T. Trewartha, Japan: A Physical, Cultural, and Regional Geography. (Madison, Wisconsin: University of Wisconsin Press, c.1945), pp. 151-2.

²Ibid., p. 153.

³Ibid., p. 154.

united geographically and socially in its own little organization. These separate social units or hamlets are known officially as buraku. . . ."⁴ A machi differs from a mura in that at least one settlement within it is large enough to be incorporated. On April 1, 1937, there were 141 shi, 1,707 machi, and 9,568 mura in Japan proper, but seemingly there were no figures available indicating the number of buraku or the number of towns (not machi).⁵

The various buraku in the mura are united by a common headman (soncho), village office (yakuba), and frequently by a common primary school and agricultural association.⁶ The buraku itself is headed by one or more nushidori, who is the caretaker of the buraku affairs and supervises community undertakings. He is elected by the responsible heads of the households in the hamlet, each house having one vote.⁷

By far the larger part of Japan's five and one-half million farm families (approximately 27 million people) live in buraku of this type. The dimensions of these little settlements range from a few hundred feet to more than 2,000.⁸ The farms that these people till are unusually

⁴J. F. Embree, Suye Mura: A Japanese Village (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, c.1939), p. 22.

⁵Trewartha, op. cit., p. 154.

⁶Embree, op. cit., p. 23.

⁷Trewartha, op. cit., p. 155.

⁸Ibid., pp. 156-7.

small by American standards. About 34 per cent till a farm of less than one-half to one and one-half acres. Thirty-four per cent more cultivate farms from this size up to one hectare or 2.47 acres. Of the remaining 32 per cent 22 per cent cultivate farms of two and one-half to four and one-half acres, and only ten per cent till farms larger than this.⁹ The average acreage cultivated per family therefore is only 2.67 as compared to 155 acres per family in the United States.¹⁰

As a result of generations of feudal subdivision, moreover, these small Japanese farms are further subdivided into a number of small plots.¹¹ As a result, some farmers go as far as one ri (2.44 miles) in order to cultivate a plot as small as 100 square feet.¹²

The basic pattern of life in these rural areas is evidently very old. Suye Mura, for instance, probably dates

⁹R. A. Felton, "The Rural Church in Japan (I)," Japan Christian Quarterly, XIII (January, 1938), 24. These figures do not take into consideration the parceling out of the large estates by the U. S. Military Government shortly after the Japanese surrender and are therefore only indicative. Cf. "Japan: Gratitude to Grumbling," U.S. News & World Report, (July 29, 1949), p. 22.

¹⁰G. B. Cressey, Asia's Lands and People (New York and London: McGraw-Hill Book Co., Inc., c.1944), p. 191.

¹¹Ibid.

¹²H. Nishikiori, Togo-Mura: A Village in Northern Japan, Translated from the Japanese by T. Sano and annotated by J. F. Embree (New York: International Secretariat Institute of Pacific Relations, 1945), p. 17.

back "at least to the time of the introduction of Chinese civilization in the sixth century."¹³ One of the reasons for this is that many of these rural areas are off main lines of travel.¹⁴ Another reason is probably the natural conservatism of the farmer.

Although the population as a whole in Japan is rising at the rate of about one million a year, rural population remained fairly stationary from 1920 to 1940, with the larger villages (machi) gaining and the rural areas per se (mura) declining somewhat.¹⁵

The larger villages are somewhat similar to the buraku, but since they serve as the shopping centers for the rural areas, non-farmers constitute a much larger proportion of the population than in the small buraku.¹⁶

This is the framework in which the Christian missionary will have to live and work. It will now be possible to understand some of the problems that will confront him as he sets about to bring the Gospel to the people that make it up.

¹³Embree, op. cit., p. 300.

¹⁴Ibid.

¹⁵Trevartha, op. cit., pp. 133-4.

¹⁶Ibid., p. 159.

CHAPTER III

SOCIAL PRESSURE

Some of the problems to be met by the Christian missionary are brought about as a result of the family system found in Japanese society. Since the family in a rural district is usually larger than one found in a city,¹ the problems arising from the family system are apt to be more acute in the country. Furthermore, as indicated in Chapter I, the old systems have survived in rural areas much more than in city and urban districts.

In the Japanese family system the concept of "house" is the most important element, and it is up to the individual to sacrifice himself if necessary when the family faces any great danger.² The family is everything, the individual nothing. As a result, no member of the family can choose any job or participate in any activity whereby the prosperity or the social standing of the family might in any way be jeopardized.³

¹H. Nishikiori, Togo-Mura: A Village in Northern Japan, Translated from the Japanese by T. Sano and annotated by J. F. Embree (New York: International Secretariat Institute of Pacific Relations, 1945), p. 11.

²K. Matsumiya, "Rural Depression and the Traffic in Women," Japan Christian Quarterly, X (January, 1935), 13.

³W. Morris, "The ABC's of Modern Japan," I. P. R. Pamphlets (New York: American Council Institute of Pacific Relations, c.1946), XX, 7.

Included in the family are the adopted sons.⁴ Adoption is very prevalent because of the need for someone to carry the family name, to take care of the ancestral tablets, and to help work for the house and provide sustenance for the old people. Quite often the adopted son is a younger brother or nephew.⁵

Closely connected with the family, and in poorer families, at least, almost synonymous with it, is the household. This includes not only the family itself, comprising several generations,⁶ but also "at least a maid-servant or a manservant or both, living with them under the same roof."⁷

The head of the Japanese family is the father or grandfather. The entire household revolves around him. He is served first at meals, is the first to use the bath evenings and the last to rise mornings. His wishes are law. In the past he had legal ownership of practically all the family property, including the children. As the head of the family, he is responsible to the ancestors for the welfare of the group.⁸ Embree's observations in *Suye Mura* bear this out:

⁴J. F. Embree, *Suye Mura: A Japanese Village* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, c.1939), pp. 81-2.

⁵Ibid., pp. 82 ff.

Morris, op. cit., p. 7.

⁷J. F. Embree, "The Japanese," Smithsonian Institution War Background Studies (Washington: Smithsonian Institution, January 23, 1943), VII, 18.

⁸Morris, op. cit., p. 8.

The house head, like the buraku head, acts as advisor and director and bears responsibility for the group of which he is the leader. The household, as a working unit is thus the basic co-operative group, and all other co-operation within the buraku depends on these constituent household groups.⁹

There is a solidarity found in the Japanese rural family rarely achieved by the city family or even the rural family in the West. This begins to form in early childhood.

If a woman has, as she may well have, one or two younger children, they all sit in the tub together. This intimate association every evening creates a strong social bond within the family between the mother and her children. While a woman has but little formal status in the home, there is a very strong emotional tie between a mother and her children. The bonds formed by a boy in early youth by sleeping together and bathing together with his mother are never completely lost by later experience in patriarchal social organization.¹⁰

As has been pointed out, "The affairs of each individual are the concern of the whole family, and the welfare of the family is the concern of each individual."¹¹ To understand the reasons for this we must see the individual in his environment.

In ordinary daily life the whole household is together for breakfast, lunch, and supper, sitting together around the fire in the evening. During work, for some things such as harvest, the whole household works together.¹²

⁹J. F. Embree, Suye Mura: A Japanese Village, p. 97.

¹⁰Ibid., p. 92.

¹¹A. R. Stone, "Difficulties in Christian Rural Permeation," Japan Christian Quarterly, X (January, 1934), 15.

¹²J. F. Embree, Suye Mura: A Japanese Village, p. 95.

This solidarity of the family is further enhanced by their religions. Daily ancestor worship at the household Buddhist shrine helps maintain the kin tie through the generations, and family group attitudes and Japanese Buddhist beliefs and practices tend to reinforce each other.¹³

All of this lends prestige to old age, as the head of the family, as noted above, is usually the father or the grandfather, and as also noted, his word is law. Here is where the problems arise for the Christian missionary. If the older people in a particular rural area are opposed to any move, it is extremely difficult to make any headway as far as a change is concerned.¹⁴ To make matters still more difficult, the older farmer is usually a conservative individual for some very good reasons, which will be shown in a later chapter. Finally, it will appear obvious that it is very difficult for anyone in this family unit to keep anything private from the others because of their close association with one another and their constant concern for one another in daily life. It therefore becomes quite necessary to win an entire family to the cause of the Christian Gospel, and this in turn depends on winning the conservative head of the house. A. R. Stone sums up the situation nicely when he states:

¹³M. Sugiyama, "The Rural Problem," Japan Christian Quarterly, VI (April, 1951), 114.

¹⁴Stone, op. cit., pp. 15-6.

In the city it is comparatively easy for people to become Christians, if they are (as so many are) separated from their family surroundings. However, in a farming community, it is exceedingly difficult for the young people in a family to even take part in new social or economic projects, let alone to attend church or become a Christian, because of the suspicion and opposition of the older and more conservative members of the family.¹⁵

This problem becomes the more acute when we view it in its community setting. There are strong bonds that also tie family with family in the Japanese village, bonds which start already the first time a child goes to school. There he meets children from all over the village. As Embree points out, his constant association with them for the next six years is an important one both for him and for the unity of the village.¹⁶ The ties of men who were classmates in school is usually very close, especially if they are of the same age. The following quotation from his book shows this:

Classmates are called dokyosei; people of the same age, donen. It is the donen tie which is more important. All through life male donen remain close. When two men meet for the first time, if they turn out to be of the same age, they are well on the way toward being friends. The ties of donen increase with age. As a man grows old and the sexual desires die down, parties of donen are the only true pleasures left in life, and the farmers of Suve say that a donen then becomes closer than a wife.¹⁷

Nor are ties of this kind limited entirely to the men.

¹⁵Ibid.

¹⁶J. F. Embree, Suve Mura: A Japanese Village, p. 185.

¹⁷Ibid., p. 190.

Similar bonds are to be found among the women:

Frequently, two or three women will bathe together, one being in the tub at a time, the others standing by and talking. There is a warm intimacy about these evening chats at the bath which keeps close the relationships between the women of three or four neighboring households and helps to make up for the social bonds they lack by being born in different mura.¹⁸

As in the family, so in the buraku itself it is difficult to keep anything secret from others. This is due to the fact that in paddy buraku all houses are rather close to one another,¹⁹ in fact, they are frequently built one against the other with but one common wall between. Furthermore, co-operation between families becomes imperative because of the need for extra help at transplanting and harvest time and because the community has no money to hire people for public works such as road building and bridge building.²⁰ Embree lists the five most important forms of co-operation in addition to the household itself as:

1. rotating responsibility by groups (kumi)
2. civic co-operation
3. helping co-operation (tetsudai, kasei) in house-building, emergencies and funerals
4. exchange labor (kattari)²¹
5. co-operative credit clubs (ko)²²

¹⁸Ibid., p. 93.

¹⁹Ibid., p. 94.

²⁰Ibid., p. 112.

²¹Called yuhi in the North. Cf. Nishikiori, op. cit.: p. 61.

²²J. F. Embree, Suye Mura: A Japanese Village, pp. 112-3.

It will not be necessary for our purposes to go into a description of each of these, but it will be enough to note that a large proportion of the population belongs to them and that they exist for the purposes of credit, selling, purchasing, and utilization.²³

About the only recreation that the people of a rural community have is at banquets and parties held for various reasons and on various occasions.²⁴ These community affairs are usually accompanied with an exchange of gifts between the families, another very important method of maintaining social relationships.²⁵

People are usually careful to fulfill their social responsibilities, for failure to do so is apt to result in an imposing of the sanction of non-co-operation by the rest of the community, a thing which would be disastrous for the average farmer. Another sanction, of particular importance to the Christian missionary, is that of ridicule. This applies especially to the young people, who are always careful to do the "traditional" thing for fear some one will laugh. An almost abnormal fear of being caught in an embarrassing situation gives this sanction of ridicule

²³R. A. Felton, "The Rural Church in Japan (I)," Japan Christian Quarterly, XIII (January, 1938), 24.

²⁴Embree lists eleven chief occasions for such parties and indicates in each instance who is invited and who pays for the party. Cf. Suye Mura: A Japanese Village, pp. 109-10.

²⁵Ibid., p. 153.

unusual force.²⁶

It is easy to see the problems that will face the missionary as a result of a communal life of this type. Not only is it then difficult to win a single member of a household without winning the whole family, but it is also unusually difficult to win a single family, for as Stone has pointed out:

. . . What is true of the farm family is in many ways true of the rural community. Each rural community is an entity in itself. A farm community is more than an aggregation of people, it is a corporate state of mind of those living in a local area. . . . A single Christian family in a rural community is almost as difficult as an individual Christian in a farm family. Young men have gone home from our central Rural Gospel Schools full of visions and Christian faith, only to find themselves alone in a community which laughed at them.²⁷

Nor does the missionary's problem end here. The Japanese village is by no means a uniform thing, but there are several types, each with its own psychological peculiarity. Sugiyama lists the following six types:

1. Old villages (Kodai hyakusho mura).
2. Villages clustering around some great personage (meiden hyakusho mura).
3. Temple villages (Jiden hyakusho mura).
4. Villages clustering around a wealthy man (Gozoku Yashiki mura).
5. Villages of defeated warriors (Tombi hyakusho mura).
6. Made-land villages (Kaihatsu shinden mura).²⁸

In the first type of village folklore and ancient cus-

²⁶Ibid., pp. 172 ff.

²⁷Stone, op. cit., p. 16.

²⁸M. Sugiyama, "The Evangelization of Villages," Japan Christian Quarterly, II (October, 1927), 358.

tom rules. Only occasionally does a new point of view pierce this "cake of custom," and it is at this point that Christianity may enter also.²⁹

The house of the "great person" is the center of village life in the second type. Because of his prestige the "great person" attempts to get and keep obedience from the other houses that cluster around his. As the father's word is law to the family, so his wish is law for the village.³⁰

The temple is the daily bread of the third type of village, and thus it is only natural for this type of village to oppose any new religion. In commenting on this kind of village and the missionary's approach to it, Sugiyama warns:

No matter how large their population, it is unwise to make these temple villages the starting points in evangelistic programmes. Postpone such villages to the very last in your plans for rural evangelism! Rather than to emphasize such a village, it may be better not to touch it at all, since in a religious village the people may have too much of religion and find difficulty in understanding its real spirit.³¹

Villages of the fifth type are dying out today. They are made up of refugees from the defeated Heike warriors and have not had intercourse with other villages since ancient times. Consequently, the people in the few that remain are "full of suspicion and very slow to turn toward

²⁹Ibid.

³⁰Ibid.

³¹Ibid., p. 359.

any new thing."³²

This will suffice to show that each type of village will require a different type of approach, and the missionary will first need to determine the type of village in which he is about to begin work. To complicate the picture, there are strong rivalries between the various types of villages, "even stronger than in the rural sections of the West."³³ Thus it will be difficult for a missionary or an evangelist to live in one village and lead men of another village.³⁴ It may be very necessary for him to restrict his activities to one village at a time.

Thus social pressure is a serious problem which the Christian missionary to the rural areas of Japan will have to face. It is pressure not only from the family in which the mission prospect finds himself, but also from all the families of the community, which are bound together by strong social ties. Although these social structures which bind the community together are being weakened today as a result of the influx of money into the economy,³⁵ they are still strong and, to a large extent, characteristic of it. Hence, for the time being, at least, they must be reckoned

³²Ibid.

³³Stone, op. cit., p. 16

³⁴W. M. Clark, "Self-supporting Rural Evangelism," Japan Christian Quarterly, VII (January, 1932), 353.

³⁵J. F. Embree, Suye Mura: A Japanese Village, p. 306.

with by the Christian worker.

CHAPTER IV

THE PROBLEM OF THE CHRISTIAN MISSIONARY

Obviously, the Christian missionary will find many problems in connection with the religious beliefs of the Japanese villagers. His doctrine will be confronting them as old and well-established beliefs. They are, in fact, more than mere beliefs; they are deeply rooted habits. The study of the ancient religions of China and India is a slow, steady process and thinking of the people here in the west, especially with respect to religious beliefs, has been, at best, only a study, a fact that has been referred to earlier.²

One of the more basic problems the missionary will face is simply understanding the religious thinking of the people. Religion in Japan, even before World War II, was a complex affair at best, if not a thing of complete mystery. The reason for this is found in a mixture of the old and the new which is so characteristic of the Japanese in general, and particularly in the realm of religion. There is a deep, abiding faith in the old, but a new faith is being born, and the old is being replaced by the new.

¹ See, for example, "The Japanese Mind," by K. I. Hori, in *The Japanese Mind*, (New York: Foreign Affairs Office of the United States, 1945), pp. 1-10.

² See, Chapter II.

CHAPTER IV

VILLAGE RELIGIOUS BELIEFS

Obviously, the Christian missionary will find many problems in connection with the religious beliefs of the Japanese villagers. His doctrine will be encroaching upon old and well-established beliefs. They are, in fact, more than mere beliefs; they are deeply rooted customs.¹ Nowhere have the ancient religions of Buddhism and Shinto a firmer grasp on the lives and thinking of the people than in the rural communities where contact with Western influence has been at best only spotty, a fact that has been referred to earlier.²

One of the more basic problems the missionary will face is simply understanding the religious thinking of the people. Religion in Japan, even before World War II, was a complex affair at best, if not a thing of hopeless confusion. The reason for this is found in a mingling of the old and the new which is so characteristic of the Japanese in general, and particularly in the realm of religion. Though always welcoming new ideas, Japanese thought often

¹M. Kozai, "Is Japan Becoming Christian?" Christian World Facts 1951 (New York: Foreign Missions Conference of North America, n.d.), p. 26.

²cf. Chapter II.

clings tenaciously to the old as well.³

Religions are not mutually exclusive in Japan.⁴ This fact alone accounts for much of the complexity. Buddhism and Shinto live side by side without any apparent conflict. The people take it as a matter of course. Buddhism is relied upon as a means of soul salvation and the pantheon of Shinto gods for protection in this life.⁵ Yet neither of these two traditional religions is actually understood to any extent by the average peasant. He leaves the understanding of them to the priests, while he may be quite ignorant of the meaning. However, he is careful to fulfill his own responsibilities to each.⁶ Problems arise for the missionary at this point because these responsibilities do not include regular weekly or even monthly attendance at either shrines or temples.⁷ This is not part of his religious thinking. Furthermore, the missionary must call attention to the fact that, although ignorant of the implications of the Japanese religions, one who adheres to them will nevertheless be held accountable by the One Who says,

³A. K. Reischauer, "The Religion in the Japan of Today," The International Review of Missions, XXVI (July, 1957), 322.

⁴W. Price, Key to Japan. (New York: The John Day Co., c.1946), p. 142.

⁵J. F. Embree, Suye Mura: A Japanese Village. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, c.1939), p. 221.

⁶Ibid.

⁷Ibid.

"Thou shalt worship the Lord thy God, and Him only shalt thou serve."

The attitude of the average villager is portrayed by a farmer whom Eubree quotes as saying:

'Some people say one should not go to shrines but just worship Hotoke (Buddha); others say one should visit shrines because Japan is the land of the kami (Shinto deities). As for myself, since people have different opinions on the matter, it is not for me to condemn them or say they are wrong. I always visit the shrines as well as worship Hotoke.'⁸

The natural question that must be asked then is: To what extent will the Japanese attempt to amalgamate Christian concepts into this already very complex framework of thought? The extent of this complexity can be seen in a cursory examination (for it can be little more than that) of some of the religious practices of the Japanese country people.

The separation of religion and state in the Japan of today is as complete as in any country in the world.

State Shinto has been disestablished as the national faith; the burden of compulsory financial support of State Shinto has been lifted from the Japanese people; Shinto doctrines and observances have been removed from the public educational system; Articles 20 and 89 of the new Constitution provide guarantees of separation of religion and state which are as clear and unequivocal as those contained in any of the written constitutions of the world.⁹

This is a fortunate change for the Christian missionary,

⁸Ibid.

⁹Religions in Japan. (Tokyo: General Headquarters, Supreme Commander for the Allied Powers, March, 1948), p. 135.

for formerly the union of church and state led to grave problems of casuistry for him. In former years almost every school in Japan was virtually compelled to accept a gift of a picture of the Emperor. Special vaults had to be built to safeguard this most sacred possession, and on ceremonial and patriotic occasions all the students had to bow to this portrait.¹⁰ Before beginning their school work in the morning every child was required to bow in the direction of the Emperor's palace, and farmers followed a similar procedure before going about their chores.¹¹ Even in Christian schools in the past the reading of the Imperial Rescript on Education was compulsory, which among other things referred to the imperial throne as "coeval with heaven and earth, infallible for all ages."¹² For many years the Japanese Government made sustained though subtle efforts to get 100% participation in Shinto shrine ceremonies, and made homage to these shrines a test of patriotism for every Japanese citizen. This was further complicated when the Japanese Government insisted that these shrines were not religious, although the populace unquestionably looked upon them as such, as did many American and Japanese scholars.¹³

¹⁰D. J. Fleming, What Would You Do? (New York: Friendship Press, c.1949), p. 58.

¹¹Embree, op. cit., p. 229.

¹²Fleming, op. cit., p. 59.

¹³Ibid., pp. 40-1.

These problems have, on the surface at least, been by-passed with the adoption of the new constitution. But even if the constitution remains as it is in the future, it must not be overlooked that this intimate connection between the state and the Shinto Religion has been going on for more than seventy-five years and has all but saturated the thinking of the people. Furthermore, the idea of a separation of religion from the state is very much a novelty to the Japanese people. There has always been a curious Oriental intermingling of religion and government, simply because the political ruler was also considered religiously divine even though not always so pronouncedly as in the past few generations.¹⁴ A new law cannot in itself eradicate the old concepts over night. Then too, it is characteristic of the Japanese to obey and follow directions without understanding the meaning or the spirit of those directions. "This ingrained obedience of the Japanese is deceptive, and hence makes it difficult to evaluate the progress of reform in Japan."¹⁵

In the home itself there are as a rule two deities: Amida (or a similar deity) in the butsumon and the sun goddess Inari, which is represented by a paper talisman, in

¹⁴R. J. D. Braibanti, "Religious Freedom in Japan," The Christian Century, LXIV (July 9, 1947), 850.

¹⁵Ibid.

the kamidana.¹⁶ Every morning the Japanese Buddhist bows before it and utters a prayer which is guaranteed to carry him to heaven.¹⁷ This routine ceremony seems to give the individual a feeling of rightness, as may be seen from a statement Embree makes: "One farmer remarked that he does not like to sleep away from home as he has no proper place to go in the morning to perform this ritual."¹⁸ Small offerings, such as two small cups of rice or a cup of shochu,¹⁹ are made daily before these household altars by the occupants.²⁰

In time past the Japanese Government issued general orders that everyone alike was to set up god shelves (kamidana) in their homes containing the name of the sun goddess. Obviously, Christians were also expected to comply with this order. "Under these circumstances," asks Fleming, "how should Christian nationals respond, and what position on this matter would a missionary take?"²¹

Although the chief deities in the house are found in connection with the betsuden and the kamidana, it would

¹⁶Embree, op. cit., p. 237 ff.

¹⁷Ibid., p. 238.

¹⁸Ibid.

¹⁹This is a type of alcoholic drink made from coarse rice.

²⁰Embree, op. cit., p. 238.

²¹Fleming, op. cit., p. 66.

be a mistake to think that these are the only ones. Often there are many others.

A man's house is full of people even when he is alone for most of these gods are regarded as, in a sense, persons. They are referred to with the honorific san or sama similar to the English 'mister' or 'sir.' When speaking of them, people say ano sh'to, meaning 'that person.' The people of Suze dislike being alone or doing things alone, and so, with the numerous gods of the household, if one must be at home alone or one's children left there, neither need feel lonely.²²

Images of Daikoku and Ebisu are kept in the kitchen and offerings made to them regularly. In front of the house is a bamboo vase containing a flower for Nichirinsan, the sun. Fresh flowers are also kept for Kama-no-Kamisama, the god of stoves, and beside the well for the well-god. Often there is a stone or small house in the yard which contains a stone or a mirror, which is the land-god and is called either Kojin or Jiushi. Likewise, a stone Jizo is frequently found in the yard and offerings made to it.²³ The stone Jizo is likewise commonly found in other places - along the road, near swimming areas and in fact, near any dangerous spot, - as he is regarded as the god of mercy.²⁴

Charms (omamori) and paper talismans (ofuda) are found in various places. Frequently they are carried on the person as a safeguard against disease and illness. These charms

²²Embree, op. cit., p. 66.

²³Ibid., pp. 240 ff.

²⁴E. Papinot, Historical and Geographic Dictionary of Japan (Ann Arbor, Michigan: Overbeck Company, 1948), p. 252.

and talismans are sold by the local priests and provide an income for the temples.²⁵ Thus they obviously will oppose anyone who might attempt to discredit the efficacy of them.

To the Western mind the superstition that infests the mind of the average Japanese peasant is bewildering. It apparently invades every area of his life, and often it is difficult to determine at what point a practice ceases to be custom and becomes superstition. This enigma the missionary will need to solve, for superstition is very widespread.

Scratch 'literate' Japan and you find just under the surface a heritage of savage superstition. Don't build your house facing northeast for that would let in the devil. Place a bow and arrow pointing northeast on the ridgepole of a new house to shoot that devil. Don't put a gate on that side - the devil will use it. Nor can you have a gate on the southwest side - it would be a byomon, sickness gate. All manner of pestilences would come through it. Don't sleep with your head toward the north - that's only for the dead. In digging a well you don't consider such material questions as where the best water may be found. The well must be on the south side of the house - that's the prosperity side. . . . To induce rain you go to the temple, get the ark of the rain god, and carry it about in procession all night. . . . Consider the signs of the zodiac in planting. Don't plant rice on the day of the monkey, because the god of rice and the god of the monkey are not on speaking terms. Plant sugar potato on the day of the cow so that it will grow large like the cow's head.²⁶

When a bridge is built, villagers are quite careful to place an offering of shochu by a post near the water as an

²⁵Embree, op. cit., pp. 242 ff.

²⁶Price, op. cit. p. 85.

offering to the water-god to gain his favor so that no harm will come to the users of the bridge.²⁷ A nanten bush is planted near the toilet. If a person is overcome while using the toilet, he can grab it and immediately recover.²⁸ A letter box is often placed next to a gravestone into which one may drop letters to the deceased.²⁹

When a child is born, the afterbirth is carefully wrapped up in paper, and at sunset the father of the child takes it out and buries it in the yard. After it is buried, he must step over the spot to insure the child's obedience. This is very important, for if an animal should run over the spot before the father steps over it, the child will always fear that animal.³⁰

People commonly believe in sorcery, but consider it dangerous to discuss it, as that might bring it down upon one. Almost every buraku possesses at least one woman who is regarded as an inugami mochi, a sorceress possessed by the dog spirit. She can at will cause sickness or death simply by showing envy or jealousy toward another.³¹

A very important person in the neighborhood is the kitoshi. This man makes a profession of prayer, and is

²⁷Embree, op. cit., p. 123.

²⁸Ibid., p. 244.

²⁹Price, op. cit., p. 122.

³⁰Embree, op. cit., p. 259.

³¹Ibid., pp. 256-7.

called upon by the people in any type of emergency, from bodily disease to advice as to where to build one's house.³²

The American Occupation has attempted to wipe out many of these superstitious notions, only a few of which are listed above, but as late as 1949 they were having little success and were being forced to modify their campaign because of the opposition of the people, and especially the Buddhist and Shinto clergy.³³ At that time U.S. News & World Report disclosed:

A recent survey showed that 53 per cent of the families in fishing and farming villages regulate their lives by the moon. They pay close heed to 'lucky' and 'unlucky' days. According to a poll conducted by the Education Ministry, one Japanese out of every four believes that the badger and the fox have the power to hypnotize. Of the families surveyed, 11 per cent held that women born in the 'year of the horse' were unfit for marriage. The last 'year of the horse' was 1906. About 20 years later Japan witnessed a wave of suicides of young women jilted by suitors who discovered that their prospective brides were born in 1906.³⁴

The superstitions at times will touch directly on the foreign missionary himself. One Christian worker, who was making good progress in a village, was forced out of a village when a nearby volcano became active, and it was rumored about that the mountain had become angry because some visiting foreigner had kicked an old sandal into the

³²Ibid., p. 250f.

³³"Superstitions Must Go," U.S. News & World Report, July 29, 1949, p. 31.

³⁴Ibid.

crater.³⁵

Incredible as this sounds in this day and age and in a country known to be as advanced as is Japan, it nevertheless is fact, and the missionary to rural districts will be forced to meet the situation. As mentioned above, these are for the most part deeply rooted customs as well as superstitions and will not be given up easily by a people which has lived in them for centuries. The missionary will constantly face the questions: Where must the line be drawn? How much of this need be changed? How much of this "custom", if indeed any, is not opposed to Christian thought?

That real opposition results from an attack on the local religions can be seen from the following episode related by the missionary, D. C. Buchanan:

Last month the writer was visiting in a rural section some five hours by rail and bus from Kyoto City. There was the faithful Christian, a midwife, who had formerly had a flourishing Sunday School in her home. Five years ago, eighty children regularly gathered to learn Bible verses and Christian hymns, and a small group of adult inquirers was formed. Then a young pastor from a neighboring town came and strongly attacked Buddhism. . . . This the Buddhists bitterly resented. The five temples of the community brought pressure to bear upon the primary school teachers, the village fathers, and the homes of the children with the result that the Sunday School was forced to close. The next Sunday when an attempt was made to gather the children together, the primary school teachers stood outside the door of the midwife's home and spoke to each child as he started to enter, forbidding him to go to Sunday

³⁵F. M. Freeth, "Women's Work in the Country," Japan Christian Quarterly, V (April, 1930), p. 154.

School and threatening bad marks in his daily school work and further punishment, should he insist on following and studying the Jesus Religion. So much resentment and bitter feeling was stirred up at that time, that to this day no hall or private house can be secured for Christian services.³⁶

Another problem that arises from this religious picture is found in the translation of certain religious words such as "God" and "worship." The missionary must ask himself: What are the mental concepts behind these terms? For the Westerner there is a long historical development that lies behind these terms with the result that these words have attained at least a Christian coloring.³⁷ But what, for instance, does the word kami, which is translated "God" mean to the Japanese? Etymologically, it may mean little more than "exalted being" or "demi-god."³⁸ This may be seen from the foregoing presentation of the various deities in Buddhism and Shinto. All of these are called kami. This word has a wide variety of meanings from simply "upper" or "above" to the highest conception of the deity, and consequently the translators of the Bible were forced to use it.³⁹ Furthermore, the Chinese ideograph used to "spell" or transcribe this word has the basic meaning of

³⁶D. C. Buchanan, "Newspaper Evangelism as Related to Rural Work," Japan Christian Quarterly, XI (January, 1936), pp. 19-20.

³⁷Fleming, op. cit., p. 50.

³⁸Ibid.

³⁹Ibid.

spirit, spirits, spiritual, divine, gods, etc. As a result, the term requires continual explanation, and must always be borne in mind by the missionary lest misunderstanding arise. Virtually the same problem exists with the words "worship" and "divine."⁴⁰ Similarly, sin is conceived of as little more than physical impurity, which probably accounts for the custom of frequent bathing among the Japanese people.⁴¹

Yet it must not be imagined that these difficulties in connection with the religious thinking of the people are insurmountable. As has been shown, "the difficulty arises not from the structure of the brain, nor from the inherent race character, but solely from the diversity of hitherto prevailing systems of thought."⁴² Therefore, there is little reason to believe that under the impact of the Christian Gospel, these patterns of thinking cannot be substantially changed, as has indeed occurred at times in the past under government pressure.⁴³

⁴⁰Ibid.

⁴¹S. L. Gulick, Evolution of the Japanese (New York: Fleming H. Revell Co., c.1903), pp. 313 ff.

⁴²Ibid., p. 330

⁴³Ibid., p. 327

CHAPTER V

ECONOMIC CONSIDERATIONS

The struggle for survival is one which all people of all time have had to face. For some the struggle has not been too hard. For the Japanese farmer it has always been very difficult,¹ and had been becoming more difficult as time went on during the first half of the Twentieth Century. Whereas in 1911 the average Japanese farmer was 135 yen in debt (the yen having a par value of \$.50), in 1937 this indebtedness had risen to about 1,000 yen per farmer.² When it is considered that the net annual income of the farmer after deducting farm and household expenses was only 132.7 yen per family, the plight of these farmers is brought sharply into focus.³

There are several factors which have been responsible to a great extent for this condition. In the first place, it must be understood that although the area of Japan proper is given as 146,651 square miles, only between 15 and 20 per cent of this land, or approximately 15,000,000 acres,

¹G. B. Sansom, Japan: A Short Cultural History. (Revised edition; New York: D. Appleton-Century Company, c. 1943), p. 172 et al.

²G. B. Cressey, Asia's Lands and People. (New York and London: McGraw-Hill Book Company, Inc., c.1944), p. 197.

³Ibid.

is arable.⁴ With about 6,000,000 farm families attempting to make a living off this land, each family has an average of about 2.5 acres, which is about two acres short of the acreage necessary to make farming in Japan profitable.⁵ It is little wonder then that the farmer should be growing poorer every year.

Another factor responsible, to some degree at least, is the conservatism of the farmer. While this is probably a result of the economic situation more than it is a cause, it nevertheless does play a part. His tendency to adhere to old methods makes the farmer hesitant to try scientific agricultural methods.⁶

More important than this in the period before and during World War II was the oppression he had to bear from all quarters.

There is an ancient Japanese saying that the farmer is like the sesame seed - the more you squeeze, the more you get. Since time immemorial, Japanese landlords, militarists, nobles, industrialists and government officials have proved the truth of the adage. The farmers paid for the civil wars and the industrialization that followed them. They paid for the luxuries of the nobles and the absentee landlords and for the ease of the small resident landlords. And they met the exactions of their many masters with the produce from

⁴I. Nitobe, Lectures on Japan. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1938), pp. 207-8.

⁵D. Berrigan and Ladejinsky, "Japan's Communists Lose a Battle," Saturday Evening Post, CCXXI (January 8, 1949), p. 102.

⁶K. Ogawa, "The Villages of Japan and Their Evangelization," Japan Christian Quarterly, VI (April, 1931), 123.

from fragments of overworked polluted land not large enough or rich enough to support their families.⁷

As indicated above, the farmer helped to industrialize the nation through taxation. His money was used to subsidize railroads, shipping and other industries and to build up the armed forces of the country.⁸ A preferential system of income taxes made this possible. Just prior to the war figures showed that in the annual income group of 300 yen peasants paid 35 per cent in taxes, while manufacturers paid only 1.5 per cent and merchants 12.5 per cent. In the 500 yen income bracket the land holder paid 51 per cent, peasant proprietors 31.5, manufacturers 18, and merchants 14 per cent. Thus if a farmer had an income of 5,000 yen, his income tax was 1,395 yen while if he lived in a city the tax was only 701 yen.⁹

Another injustice of which these figures take no account was the practice of assessing the tax on the farm family as if it were a single individual, thus putting them in a higher income bracket although there may have been as many as ten wage earners in the family that the income had to support.¹⁰

Nevertheless, as late as April, 1944, U.S. Government

⁷Berrigan and Ladejinsky, op. cit., p. 28.

⁸Cressey, op. cit., p. 196.

⁹Ibid., p. 197.

¹⁰W. Price, Key to Japan. (New York: The John Day Company, c.1946), p. 52.

monitors overheard Radio Tokyo criticize Japanese farmers for their "love of luxuries and gaieties" and urge them to save a quarter of their meagre income for emergencies!¹¹

But it was not oppression by the government alone that made things difficult for the peasant. Seventy per cent of the 6,000,000 farm families were tenants or part tenants. Again the rule was "all the traffic can bear," as landlords charged 50 per cent or more of the crop rental. This left the farmer about 30 per cent of his crop after he had paid his rent, purchased his fertilizer and other equipment and supplies.¹² The rent was due just after the harvest when the price for rice was at its lowest.¹³

The result of this has already been seen. The farmer was plunged into ever deeper debt. Interest rates aggravated the situation since they were usually between 15 and a usurious 30 per cent!¹⁴ Another result is long hours, especially in certain seasons of the year when the peasant must get as great a yield from his small plot of land as he possibly can.¹⁵

¹¹Ibid., p. 50.

¹²Berrigan and Ladejinsky, op. cit., p. 26.

¹³W. Morris, "The ABC's of Modern Japan," I.P.R. Pamphlets (New York: American Council Institute of Pacific Relations, c.1946), XI, p. 56.

¹⁴Ibid.

¹⁵H. Nishikiori, Togo-Mura: A Village in Northern Japan Translated from the Japanese by T. Sano and annotated by J. F. Mabree (New York: International Secretariat Institute of Pacific Relations, 1945), p. 24.

Much of this situation has been alleviated under the guidance of the occupational government. Under the provisions of the Agrarian-reform Program passed in October, 1946, the Japanese Government bought about 80 per cent of the land cultivated by the tenants (4,500,000 acres) and has been re-selling it to the farmers who work it.¹⁶ Much of this land has come from the 3 per cent of the landholders who formerly held 30 per cent of the cultivated land.¹⁷ But although the land is now more evenly divided, it must be borne in mind that the average of 2.5 acres per farm family remains unchanged.

The period of reconstruction, however, has brought with it the specter of inflation. Already in 1948 the yen had been reduced to one-hundredth of its purchasing power.¹⁸ Yet this too is being brought under control and has begun to decelerate, primarily as a consequence of the new credit-curb policy of the Bank of Japan.¹⁹

What effect does this background of financial oppression and its resulting poverty have upon the efforts of the Christian missionary? For one thing, the Japanese farmer has become extremely wary of anything new. His whole life and

¹⁶Berrigan and Ladejinsky, op. cit., p. 101.

¹⁷Ibid., p. 28.

¹⁸Religions in Japan. (Tokyo: General Headquarters, Supreme Commander for the Allied Powers, March, 1948), p. 163.

¹⁹"Two-Billion Dollar Failure in Japan," Fortune, XXXIX (April, 1949), p. 72.

thinking is quite naturally characterized by conservatism, as Stone points out:

The most striking trait of the rural mind is conservatism. The farmer is inherently suspicious of anything different or new, be it a farm implement, a cooperative society, or a religion. This conservatism is due in part to the need for the greatest caution in expenditure, made necessary by the prevailing meagre income of the Japanese farmer. This financial caution is carried over into other than business matters, and is characteristic of the farmer's attitude in educational, domestic, social and religious affairs. . . . The result of this conservatism is that ancient traditions, customs, and superstitions remain strongly entrenched in rural communities. Christianity cannot stop the farmers from being conservative; but it must recognize that they are, and so to meet them armed with patience and understanding.²⁰

Others doubt that his conservatism is as an important a factor as is often claimed. In 1938 Felton wrote:

The conservatism of farmers is often mentioned as one of the main obstacles to rural evangelism by the pastors, who prefer to establish their church in the towns or country seats. But when one studies the vocational membership of these town churches he discovers that they are largely made up of farmers from the surrounding villages. In fact in many of them the majority of the members are farmers. This would indicate that the conservatism of the farmers in joining a church is not as great as the ordinary conservatism of the ministers in establishing the church in the villages.²¹

Another difficulty arising out of the economic picture as it applies to the farmer is the lack of time and inclination to be concerned with spiritual matters. In the struggle to keep soul and body together, the needs for the

²⁰A. R. Stone, "Difficulties In Christian Rural Permeation," Japan Christian Quarterly, IX (January, 1934), 15.

²¹R. A. Felton, "The Rural Church in Japan (I)," Japan Christian Quarterly, XIII (January, 1938), 28-9.

former are very often sidetracked and forgotten,²² or more than likely are never even thought of at all. In certain sections sericulture begins in May, and for the next five months the entire family is so completely absorbed in their occupation that they have no time for other matters. Those who should know state flatly: "Preachers cannot do work during this period."²³ In Northern Japan particularly the pace of work is so severe in the summer that in the winter months the men fall into the mood of pleasure-seeking, and come to regard money as "first, last and everything, and, so far as religion is concerned, seem to be almost incapable of paying the least attention to it."²⁴ C. Noss summed up this rather subtle, yet very real difficulty when he wrote:

In brief, it looks as if on account of the menace of the difficulty of living, rural people were running into the way of saying, 'We don't care a hang,' and that those who think earnestly about life and religion are disappearing entirely. The fact is that in spite of education being extended more and more, the view has come to prevail that religion on the contrary is a superfluity not essential to life.²⁵

Another problem is that of self-support. How can the

²²M. Sugiyama, "The Evangelization of Villages," Japan Christian Quarterly, II (October, 1927), 355.

²³Y. Kurihara, "Village Evangelism," Japan Christian Quarterly, III (October, 1928), 28-9.

²⁴C. Noss, "Villager's Idea of Life and Religion," Japan Christian Quarterly, VI (April, 1931), 137.

²⁵Ibid.

rural masses, who under the present over-crowded conditions can never hope for anything more than a bare living, maintain their own church and pastor? Dr. Kagawa once said that fifty sen (about twenty-five cents under the old exchange) a year could be considered a generous cash contribution from the average farm family.²⁶ To be sure, this problem will not affect the missionary himself, as he will receive support from some established group, such as a Church or a Missionary Society, but it nevertheless is a problem he will have to face when he attempts to put the newly founded mission congregation on its own. The danger is that the poorer members, not being able to assume their share of the support, may drop out to "save face." The result of this, in turn, is that the church in a particular village may tend to become a religious club for the well-to-do.²⁷ Some, such as Stone, regard this matter of self-support in the face of village poverty as constituting "the greatest of practical problems in setting up a rural programme,"²⁸ but there are others who believe it can be solved.²⁹

Since the surrender, inflation has made the maintenance

²⁶Stone, op. cit., p. 20

²⁷E. F. Upton, "One Million Missionaries," Japan Christian Quarterly, XIV (January, 1939), 13.

²⁸Stone, op. cit., p. 20.

²⁹E. M. Clark, "Self-supporting Rural Evangelism," Japan Christian Quarterly, VII (January, 1932), 61 ff.

of Christian schools, a common missionary agency, difficult, because they require greatly increased budgets.³⁰ But this problem too will tend to fade as the economy rights itself.

One final result of the poor state of the farmer which is occasionally cited, is the threat of communism. As long ago as 1931 the following appeared in the Japan Christian Quarterly:

Marxism has already been let loose like a flood over them [the country populace], and indeed has found a ready response in many hearts. They have neither the ability to see through it, nor the power to detect its faults.³¹

Here is also a problem for the missionary, for while they have time to discuss Marxism, they refuse to take time to think of their own soul's salvation. Actually, however, this is probably less a problem than it is one of the ubiquitous excuses that all pastors get to hear. At any rate, for the time being this threat seems to have been forestalled as a result of the new Land Reform Bill and the Agricultural Readjustment Law.³² Whether it will crop up again in future years remains for the future to disclose.

One may say then that economic stringencies often pose grave problems for the advance of the Christian Church in

³⁰Religions in Japan, p. 115.

³¹K. Ogawa, op. cit., p. 124.

³²Berrigan and Ladejinsky, op. cit., passim.

rural areas. Centuries of oppression have resulted in a conservative shell which the individual farmer has built around himself - a shell which is suspicious of anything new, even in the religious field. The struggle for existence leaves the farmer little time in the busy season to think of anything but his work; in the slack season there is a tendency toward pleasure-seeking. Financial burdens will make self-support in any case a difficult matter. While the reforms instituted as a result of the occupation have attempted to ease the pressure on the farmer and have thwarted the threat of communism in rural areas at least temporarily, overcrowded conditions and the need for more land will tend to make a real solution of the condition extremely unlikely.

CHAPTER VI

PUBLIC MORALITY

Generally speaking, the Japanese are known for their high ideals of public morality. Few peoples have such high standards of loyalty, and the teaching and practice of the Japanese on the relations between parents and children are perhaps unexcelled.¹ As Gulick has satisfactorily shown, this very probably stems from the influence of Confucius.² Yet in one area at least, Japanese morality (and this includes the Japanese rural people) has unhappily been as low as it has been high in others. This is to be found in the general area of sex, and poses serious problems for the Christian missionary. Consequently, no study of the missionary's problems can afford to ignore the moral implications of this phase of Japanese culture.

The low position of the woman and privileges attached to masculinity can be traced as far back as the 14th and 15th centuries when anarchy and warfare prevailed, and a man could not afford to let his property go to a daughter who could not fight to protect it after his death.³ This

¹S. L. Gulick, Evolution of the Japanese (New York: Fleming H. Revell Company, c.1903), p. 249.

²Ibid., p. 269.

³G. B. Sanson, Japan: A Short Cultural History. (Revised edition; New York: D. Appleton-Century Company, c. 1943), p. 362.

has developed to a point where today the Japanese ideal of womanhood is a woman that dutifully caters to the man's every whim and quietly and subserviently goes about her tasks without complaint. Whereas the man has complete freedom in his sexual life, and may visit a brothel every evening if he so desires and otherwise engage in illicit love affairs, the woman may not act in a similar manner but must in every case submit to him and remain true to him.⁴ Since only very rarely is she loved by her husband,⁵ Japanese women often develop hysteri, a term applied to all women known for their instability, nervousness, or promiscuity.⁶ This is not so common among farm women as it is among city and urban women, however, since the farm woman exercises more freedom in what she says and does than the well-bred Japanese woman.⁷

In certain rural localities, the trial marriage is very commonly practiced. This lasts three days during which time the bride stays at the house of the groom. If the families of both the bride and the groom consider it a favorable match after this period, the marriage is allowed to continue and may or may not be followed by a wedding ceremony.

⁴J. F. Embree, Suye Mura: A Japanese Village (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, c.1939), pp. 175-6.

⁵Ibid., p. 177.

⁶Ibid., p. 175.

⁷Ibid., p. 177.

Little depends on the feelings of the bride and the groom, the parents having almost the entire say in the matter.⁸

Divorce is by common consent. But when there is no mutual consent and action must be brought, the woman does not have the same rights as does the man.⁹ Consequently, the divorce rate is high, and would be higher if it were not for the fact that quite frequently, if not usually, the marriage is not recorded in the village office until the first child has been born.¹⁰

Once married, a woman's life is characterized by monotonous drudgery and toil. This applies more particularly to the country woman, as may be seen from the following:

Conditions of life for a rural woman are essentially different from those of her city cousins. She has the responsibility not only for work within the home, but during the busy spring and summer months she must work all day with her husband in the fields, often carrying a baby on her back. Her children may have to start early for a distant school house, while older sons and daughters go by train to attend a city high school; this makes it necessary for her to rise very early to prepare breakfast and lunches. She has little to relieve the monotony of the long winter months, with no educational or spiritual advantages, which the town and city afford. Little wonder that many farmers' wives grow old before their time, and are withered and bent at forty.¹¹

The country women are generally uneducated and even

⁸Ibid., p. 211.

⁹Gulick, op. cit., p. 265.

¹⁰Embree, op. cit., p. 213.

¹¹G. D. Odds, "Rural Women," Japan Christian Quarterly, VI (April, 1931), 127.

more superstitious than are the men. When they are faced with a difficult situation, they go to fortune tellers for advice or buy a talisman to soothe their anxieties.¹² The experience of one Christian worker will show to what extent the Japanese country woman is expected to stay at home and tend to her work, and that her efforts to broaden herself are actually frowned upon by many husbands.

When with the late Bishop Honda, I once went to a country place in Kanagawa Prefecture to hold a women's religious meeting at the home of a leading Christian in the town, we were surprised to note the presence of an unusual number of women. It was said to be a record attendance in the history of the town. At that time, incredible as it appears, we were informed by a lady in the audience that it was her first chance to go out of her house since she was married and come to reside in it.¹³

When a child is born, which is said to be the most important service of woman,¹⁴ there are few midwives and even fewer doctors in the rural areas. Nor would the average farm woman have the few yen necessary for their remuneration. Instead the neighboring women and friends gather together and give their services. Since they have little idea of sanitation, child-bed fever and frequent loss of life is common.¹⁵

¹²K. Uzaki, "The Evangelistic Task Before the Church," Japan Christian Quarterly, I (January, 1926), 31.

¹³Ibid.

¹⁴M. Sugiyama, "The Rural Problem," Japan Christian Quarterly, VI (April, 1931), 112.

¹⁵Ibid.

Prostitution is a very prevalent evil throughout Japan. There are at least four types of prostitutes in Japan: the geisha, the joro (licensed prostitute), the waitress in the country cafe, and the streetwalker.¹⁶ Although in the city the geisha is not necessarily immoral, in the country the term is frequently used synonymously with joro.¹⁷ The same may be said of the cafe waitresses and hotel maids, ninety per cent of which are said to be immoral.¹⁸

Statistics from one country village reveal that of the 467 girls aged 17 to 25, fifty-seven or 12.4 per cent were engaged by the owners of licensed houses alone.¹⁹ Moreover, of the 162 outgoing female workers from the town 57 were listed as registered prostitutes, 18 as private prostitutes, 12 as geisha, and 26 as waitresses in cafes - a total of 113 or 70 per cent engaged in immoral work.²⁰

The basic reason for so high a percentage of women engaged in immoral work is probably a result, as some believe,²¹ of the economic plight of the farmer. Just after a typhoon, drought, or flood has destroyed the crops, agents for the

¹⁶K. Matsumiya, "Rural Depression and the Traffic in Women," Japan Christian Quarterly, X (January, 1935), 9.

¹⁷Mabree, op. cit., p. 177.

¹⁸W. Price, Key to Japan (New York: The John Day Company, c.1946), p. 80.

¹⁹Matsumiya, op. cit., pp. 8-9.

²⁰Ibid., p. 9.

²¹Price, op. cit., p. 73.

brothels come through the villages and offer the farmer some money for his prettiest daughter. It is when the farmer is in such a difficult financial position that he is most likely to part with her. The average price just before World War II was about forty dollars for a girl of ten years old, less for one younger.²² This rather frequent custom is not particularly frowned upon as it would be in the West.²³ In January, 1946, General MacArthur banned such selling of girls for the purposes of prostitution,²⁴ but it is to be noted that officially the traffic in women had been outlawed since 1872,²⁵ but the law was never rigidly enforced. Since many men cannot afford a real mistress or too many trips to town to visit the geisha, there is usually a widow in the buraku who is also available for some small consideration.²⁶

There is a general lack of modesty to be found especially in the more remote country villages. One may often see men and women walking home stark naked from the public bath house even in midwinter.²⁷ Shopkeepers often sit in

²²Ibid.

²³Embree, op. cit., p. 177.

²⁴"Japan: Girl Freedom," Newsweek, XXVII (February 4, 1946), p. 45.

²⁵Matsumiya, op. cit., p. 177.

²⁶Embree, op. cit., p. 163.

²⁷Price, op. cit., p. 136.

a tub of water under the counter and only occasionally stepping out to reach a dripping hand for some article of goods from the shelves.²⁸ Although mixed bathing has been outlawed, often the public baths merely have separate entrances marked "Men" and "Women," but once inside there is but one common bath. "Sometimes," reports Price, "the two sections of the bath are divided only by a bamboo pole, or by a string, or a panel of glass."²⁹

Among the children sex games are very common.³⁰ At parties it is the women particularly that engage in lewd dancing and pantomime and sing ribald songs.³¹ The monotony of the work in the field is very often relieved by coarse jokes of a sexual nature.³² Since the end of the war a new evil has arisen in the form of pornographic literature. As a result of the extreme shortage of paper, publishers are printing little that is not readily salable, and this means little that is not obscene.³³

The occupation has done little to improve these moral

²⁸Ibid., p. 137.

²⁹Ibid.

³⁰Embree, op. cit., p. 195.

³¹Ibid., p. 102.

³²Ibid., p. 134.

³³R. Chapman, "Japan: Propaganda to Pornography," Saturday Review of Literature, XXXI (July 31, 1948), p. 8.

deficiencies. The writer himself observed that American soldiers frequent the brothels almost as often as do the Japanese themselves.³⁴ As a result of the difficult living conditions since the war's end there has been an increase in the number of streetwalkers throughout the country.³⁵ Nowhere has the writer found any reference that might indicate that houses of prostitution have been anything but condoned. Furthermore, the introduction of the modern dance and kissing in public by American personnel (both of which are considered lewd by Japanese moral standards) have often left the average Japanese with the impression that his morality can hardly be improved upon by a Westerner.

The problems which all of these things present to the missionary need hardly be elaborated upon. Many of them lie merely in the fact that these conditions exist. To what extent can the missionary ignore the social evils as presented above? Can he ignore them at all? If he cannot, what steps can he take in his own locality to improve the situation? These are questions he must both ask and answer to the satisfaction of his own conscience.

Some claim that because the chief interests of the country people seems to be "the women with the samisen (a three-stringed guitar) and the sake bottle," it is diffi-

³⁴The author was stationed in various places on the Island of Honshu from September, 1945, to February, 1946.

³⁵R. Chapman, loc. cit.

cult to find a point of contact with them.³⁶ Perhaps the whole moral question as it presents itself in rural Japan is directly related to the struggle for existence outlined in the previous chapter, the people having little time for an appreciation of spiritual values.

Furthermore, they have little sense of wrongdoing in connection with many of these practices. For instance, as has been seen, a man is not particularly looked down upon for selling his daughter, and in fact a girl would bring dishonor to her family if she should refuse to comply. By submitting to the will of her father in this matter, she is helping to preserve the family in its distress.³⁷ In the matter of mixed public bathing Japanese feel no shame or sense of impropriety, for according to their view any exposure of the body incidental to health and cleanliness is proper. It becomes improper only when it is done merely to "show off a pretty figure."³⁸ Usually a Japanese will refuse to look where he knows someone is exposed. Some feel that the overcrowded conditions have necessitated these mores. Is such exposure under these conditions therefore less sinful? Can a Christian continue to practice them in view of the crowded conditions and lack of proper bathing

³⁶S. M. Erickson, "Away From the Beaten Path," Japan Christian Quarterly, I (April, 1926), 136.

³⁷Matsumiya, op. cit., p. 13.

³⁸Price, op. cit., p. 136.

facilities in his own home? These are the problems with which the missionary must cope.

Another problem faces the missionary in regard to reaching the rural women, many of whom are only occasionally permitted to attend public functions. They will often have to be evangelized in their homes.³⁹ This is best done through other women, but there are few woman workers available.⁴⁰ Perhaps the solution is to be found in having one woman lead another,⁴¹ but with the woman's heavy burden of work and little available time, even this poses somewhat of a problem.

³⁹Uzaki, op. cit., p. 31.

⁴⁰Ibid.

⁴¹Ibid.

CHAPTER VII

THE MISSIONARY HIMSELF

There are certain problems that arise for the Christian missionary to the rural areas of Japan as a result of his own background, especially if he is a foreigner. While quite often they are the same difficulties that a Christian minister in the home country who had been raised in an urban area would face were he to be sent to a rural community at home,¹ they nevertheless must be considered.

Whereas in Japanese urban areas a foreign missionary's native knowledge of English (or some other foreign tongue) and his quaint customs are an asset, this is not the case in the country.² His being a Westerner, as is frequently the case, is all too apt to give the false impression that Christianity is a Western religion.³ In letters received from Japanese acquaintances made since the armistice in Japan, the author has observed a stubborn tendency to equate democracy and Christianity in the minds of the Japanese even though he has repeatedly emphasized to these people that

¹A. P. Hassell, "Rural Evangelism," Japan Christian Quarterly, III (October, 1928), 337.

²A. R. Stone, "Difficulties in Christian Rural Permeation," Japan Christian Quarterly, IX (January, 1934), 21.

³Ibid.

this is not true.

The standard of living in the rural areas will quite naturally be lower than in the city. This will pose somewhat of a physical problem for the missionary who has always had modern conveniences at his disposal. One rural missionary comments:

Village houses are meant for folk who live most of their time out-of-doors. Hence lighting, ventilation, and conveniences are not suitable for an indoor person. Mud floor kitchens are models of inconvenience except in the newer houses. A part of our lightest furniture, which we took with us, invoked comments from our neighbors about its ponderousness and quantity. To keep warm in winter we substituted [sic] glass for paper doors and installed one stove.⁴

Food is more difficult to obtain, oddly enough, than it is in the city. Meat, except for poultry and fish, and fresh vegetables are obtainable only intermittently and are usually of inferior quality. Canned goods and, in fact, all manufactured articles are more expensive than in the city - when they can be obtained at all. Even the fruit is often not for sale, as it is contracted to brokers while it is still green.⁵

The missionary will be handicapped if he has not spent a good portion of his past life in a rural atmosphere. This applies as well to the native worker as it does to the

⁴H. and H. Bovenkerk, "Village Life - A Missionary Family's Experience," Japan Christian Quarterly, X (July, 1935), 229.

⁵Ibid.

missionary. He must be able to understand the problems of the farmer and see things from his viewpoint. This is not something that one can acquire from the study of rural economics and sociology in a city seminary, but is rather a thing that emanates from personal experience in a rural area.⁶ This experience is necessary in order to get a point of contact with the farmer.⁷

As it is, it will often prove very difficult to find such a point of contact. The missionary will have to be acquainted with the customs and culture of his area, and with the general psychology of the people with whom he will work.⁸ Although the general condition of the farmers is the same throughout the country, their feelings, their customs, and their very language differs from one locality to the next.⁹ Consequently, the missionary or native worker must know something of local history, local economics, and local standards of living. This again is not to be obtained by scientific study, but rather by actually entering into the life of the people.¹⁰ The extent of this hiatus between

⁶A. R. Stone, op. cit., p. 17.

⁷S. M. Erickson, "Away From the Beaten Paths," Japan Christian Quarterly, I (April, 1926), 139.

⁸S. Tsukada, "The Christian Message and Rural Japan," Japan Christian Quarterly, II (July, 1927), 243-4.

⁹K. Ogawa, "The Villages of Japan and Their Evangelization," Japan Christian Quarterly, VI (April, 1931), 124.

¹⁰Ibid., p. 125.

the Christian worker and the rural man can be seen from the following:

The farmer and the fisherman live in an entirely different thought-world from that of the congregations present at our Bible and cooking classes. They also live in a different thought-world from that of the missionary and the Japanese minister. The difference consists, among other things, in dress, education, culture, and financial circumstances. . . . The Christian heralds in their automobile hustle by the farmer with his loaded cart or dodge him on the crowded street, and there is the mutual feeling that the two parties have little in common.¹¹

Willard Price, who spent many years in Japan as a writer, is of the opinion that the longer one is in the country, the less he understands of the Japanese.¹² He quotes the former Ambassador Grew as having replied when asked what the Japanese would do in a certain crisis, "I don't know. . . . But ask any of the tourists out here. They'll tell you."¹³

The missionary will need to exercise care in presenting his message to the Japanese rural people especially. Not that he will compromise his message at all, but, although highly literate, it cannot be said that the Japanese rural people are highly educated. The missionary must present his message "in language and backgrounds which render it understood by even the most illiterate members of the rural

¹¹Hassell, op. cit., p. 338.

¹²W. Price, Key to Japan (New York: The John Day Company, c.1946), p. 4.

¹³Ibid.

group."¹⁴ Ordinary tracts are often too difficult for use in rural communities.¹⁵ Yet a problem arises here too, for quite often there are some enlightened people in a rural group that may be repulsed by what may appear to be an oversimplification.¹⁶ Even the ordinary farmer does not like to feel that the speaker is "talking down" to him.¹⁷ Thus the missionary will constantly have to guard against oversimplification and a condescending attitude on the one hand, and being misunderstood on the other. Prof. E. C. Zimmermann, who heads the Mission School at Concordia Seminary, St. Louis, and who spent fourteen years as a missionary in China, related to the author that on one occasion an Oriental pastor, Rev. Wei T'ien-p'ei, told him never to say, "I will teach you," because thus the missionary places himself in relation to his hearer as teacher to pupil, in other words, above his hearer. This may be noticed at once and even resented. He should rather say, "I will tell you," which puts him on a footing of equality.

Other than a sincere love for the people and a sincere desire to win their souls for the Lord Jesus, perhaps the

¹⁴E. M. Clark, "Principles of the New Rural Church Advance," Japan Christian Year Book 1940, edited by C. W. Iglehart (Tokyo: The Christian Literature Society, 1941), p. 142.

¹⁵Erickson, op. cit., p. 137.

¹⁶Clark, op. cit., p. 142.

¹⁷Stone, op. cit., pp. 18-9.

most outstanding characteristic that a missionary to rural areas must possess is patience. The lack of patience is cited as one of the most common reasons for failure in country work.¹⁸ The worker must be prepared to stay five or ten years, or even his entire lifetime in one locality if necessary.¹⁹ Sugiyama spent fifteen years in evangelistic work among Japanese villagers and has this to say:

When you go from a city into a village, the rural people at first seem very reserved, and do not make friends quickly, rather they watch you from a distance. For about a year you are being examined and tested, and after a whole year the most you may hope for is to have it said of you, "That person looks like one who would not do wrong!" By the end of the second year they may say of you, "He is a good man!" and by the end of the third year gradually you may be able to begin to do some Christian work. Therefore to the missionaries in this audience I would say that if you send an evangelist to a village and feel that because he has had no results in three years' time, you must change him to another place, you will never succeed. You need the courage to trust him to stay in one village three or even five years without results.²⁰

It would be unfair to say that the missionary's being a foreigner is always and in every instance a detriment to the cause of the Gospel. On the contrary, the foreign missionary possesses at least two positive advantages. First, the average Japanese looks upon him as an authority on Christianity, and what he says is taken as first-hand and

¹⁸K. Ogawa, "Rural Women," Japan Christian Quarterly, VI (April, 1931), 125.

¹⁹K. Uzaki, "The Evangelistic Task Before the Church," Japan Christian Quarterly, I (January, 1926), 30.

²⁰M. Sugiyama, "The Evangelization of Villages," Japan Christian Quarterly, II (October, 1927), 358.

dependable. Secondly, the sacrifice that he is considered to have made in leaving his own country (especially if it is a prosperous contry like the United States), in learning a strange language, and living in the interior where the comforts he is accustomed to are often found wanting, gives silent but strong backing to his message in the eyes of many of the people.²¹

Then also, the average Japanese soon places full confidence in the foreign missionary, for he wants someone to whom he can reveal his inmost thoughts - a thing he would rarely do with one of his own race.²²

²¹Hassell, op. cit., p. 337.

²²E. C. Zimmermann, as told first-hand to the author.

CHAPTER VIII

MISCELLANEOUS CONSIDERATIONS

There are a few miscellaneous matters which ought to be considered as problems with which the missionary to Japan's rural areas should be familiar. Some of them have been brought closer to solution by the American Occupation, while others merely require less explanation and hence are afforded less space.

Jesus Christ was not content to rest after he had cared for a man's soul. Even the casual reader of the New Testament will have noted the many references to the Lord's healing of physical diseases and ailments. As His follower the Christian missionary will be concerned with the physical well-being of those to whom he comes.

Before 1946 this was a rather serious problem. Disease took a high toll of lives every year. In 1934, for instance, there were 18 deaths for every 1,000 Japanese, whereas two years ago there were only 12 deaths per 1,000 population.¹ Conditions were particularly bad in the country where doctors were few and ill-trained. Some doctors were little better than quacks.² The death rate in one village, which is

¹"Danger in Japan: Too Many People," U.S. News & World Report, XXVII (September 9, 1949), p. 26.

²J. F. Embree, Suye Mura: A Japanese Village (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, c.1939), p. 225.

probably typical of the rural areas throughout the country, was 24.4 per 1,000.³

Credit for the improvement in the five years since the war is largely due to Brigadier General Crawford Sams, who has directed the medical program carried on throughout Japan by the U. S. Military Government.⁴ Millions of rats were killed in a nation-wide extermination effort.⁵ In December, 1945, there were 31,141 cases of typhus at one time. Now there are rarely as many as 50 cases at once.⁶ In the years 1945 and 1946 there were 17,800 cases of small pox. The entire population of the country was vaccinated, and in 1948 there were only 29 cases reported.⁷ Diphtheria is down 83 per cent, and there has been no known case of cholera since December, 1946.⁸ In 1945 the death rate from tuberculosis was 280 per 100,000 population. This has been reduced to 181 per 100,000 (in 1950, presumably).⁹ Thus this problem of health seems to be on its way toward solution.

³H. Nishikiori, Togo-Mura: A Village in Northern Japan, translated from the Japanese by T. Sano and annotated by J. F. Embree (New York: International Secretariat Institute of Pacific Relations, 1945), p. 12.

⁴X. Holliday, "Japan Discovers Modern Medicine," The Reader's Digest, LVIII (April, 1951), p. 110.

⁵Ibid., pp. 110-1.

⁶Ibid., p. 111.

⁷Ibid.

⁸Ibid.

⁹Ibid.

Another problem which has been mentioned in the past arises out of the strong nationalism of the country people,¹⁰ a direct result of the unification of the people's religion with their patriotism by the Japanese Government leaders.¹¹ This is no longer the problem that it was with the separation of the state and religion as it now exists in Japan, but whether future years will bring this problem to the surface again is a moot question. There are some who contend that the militarists will once again regain control of Japan not long after the occupation is withdrawn.¹² Others believe that the Japanese Government will sponsor a Christian movement and use Christianity as a "secret weapon" to win the confidence of American Christians.¹³ If this is the case, the first signs of the real intent of the Japanese will become evident in the rural areas where the nationalistic feeling has always been strongest.¹⁴ At the present, however, there seems to be no evidence of this.

A more immediate difficulty is to be found in the hostility that exists between the country people and those

¹⁰R. A. Felton, "The Rural Church in Japan (I)," Japan Christian Quarterly, XIII (January, 1938), 25.

¹¹Ibid.

¹²W. Price, Key to Japan (New York: The John Day Company, c.1946), p. 288.

¹³Ibid.

¹⁴A. R. Stone, "Difficulties in Christian Rural Permeation," Japan Christian Quarterly, IX (January, 1934), 14.

of the city. Stone flatly declares that the mixing of town and village people together in one congregation is an "impossibility."¹⁵ Yet Felton claims that a study of the vocationally membership of the town churches discloses that they are largely made up of farmers from surrounding villages. "In fact," he states, "in many of them the majority of the members are farmers."¹⁶

Finally, there are some who claim that the lack of unity among Christians forms one of the greatest of problems in advancing the Gospel in rural areas.¹⁷ Churches are clustered together in cities without much planning, leaving 95 per cent or more of the rural areas virtually untouched by the Gospel.¹⁸ Perhaps the reason for this is a realization by mission directors that many, if not most, of the villages have stopped growing in terms of population,¹⁹ whereas the town and city population is growing by leaps and bounds.²⁰ Hence, there is a reluctance to take on more rural work. Nevertheless, the need remains, and a co-operative effort among Christian churches may be necessary to fulfill it.

¹⁵Ibid., p. 19.

¹⁶Felton, op. cit., pp. 28-9.

¹⁷H. Nicholson, "Rural Evangelism - Some Practical Suggestions," Japan Christian Quarterly, XI (July, 1936), 258.

¹⁸Felton, op. cit., p. 28.

¹⁹Mishikiori, op. cit.

²⁰"Danger in Japan: Too Many People," p. 50.

CONCLUSION

Since the purpose of this study has been to investigate the problems of the missionary to rural areas in Japan, rather than a study of one particular problem, there are few conclusions that need be drawn. The study has revealed that there are indeed serious problems that arise from the family system and the community solidarity that exists in these rural areas, from the financial status of the farmer, from his ideas of morality, and from his cultural and religious background.

Some of these problems have been brought closer to solution by the influence of the American Occupation in the last five years. Its land reforms, health measures, and the almost complete separation of the Shinto Religion from the Japanese State that it has effected have been particularly significant in this connection. Here and there this same occupation has perhaps inadvertently brought on new problems, especially in the area of public morality. However, from the material available it seems safe to assert that from the missionary's point of view the American Occupation has done more good than harm for the spreading of the Christian Gospel.

The problems of community solidarity and the conservatism that the farmer is often said to possess will probably become less acute as time goes on and the influence of

Western ideas, modern industrialization, and mechanization of Japanese farms is more and more felt in the hinterland. Other problems, such as the financial status of the farmer resulting, as it does, directly from the lack of land available for farming, although for the time being partially relieved by the new land reforms, appear to be much farther from a real solution.

At this writing General Douglas MacArthur has just been relieved of his post as Supreme Commander for the Allied Powers in the Far East, and there much talk of a peace treaty between the Allies and the Japanese. Whether these changes will have any effect on the mission work among the rural Japanese remains for the future to disclose.

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